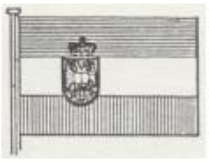
The YUGOSLAV NAVY 1918–41



by **Milan Vego**

IN THE FALL OF 1918, the disintegrative tendencies within Austria-Hungary were greatly accelerated. Many new committees sprang up in the territories populated by the South Slavs, taking over local administration. The National Council of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was established in Zagreb at the beginning of October 1918. This self-proclaimed body was to represent the political aspirations of all South Slavs then living in the Monarchy. On October 28, the National Council discussed for the first time the question of the Austro-Hungarian fleet. Soon thereafter there was an exchange of delegates between the National Council and the Austro-Hungarian Navy Section in Vienna. However, by October 28 the newly formed "sailor councils" onboard Austro-Hungarian warships in the main naval base, Pola, had decided that the crews would leave their ships by November 1, regardless of the outcome of the political negotiations between

The first warships of the Yugoslav Navy were ships of the former Austro-Hungarian fleet, finally taken over at the beginning of March 1921. One of these vessels was the torpedo boat **T1**, *seen here, the former Austro-Hungarian* **76T**. *This ship had a remarkably long career, not being broken up until 1959.* **Photograph courtesy C. W. Beilstein Collection.**

Zagreb and Vienna. The Navy Section informed the Port Admiralty, Pola, on October 30, that it must hand over all naval vessels to the representatives of the National Council in Zagreb. Similar orders were sent to local Austro-Hungarian naval commanders in Trieste, Fiume, Sibernik, the Gulf of Cattaro and the Danube Flotilla commander. Then on October 31 the Emperor Charles issued an order directing that all ships, coastal fortresses and all navy establishments be turned over to the control of the National Council of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in Zagreb. At that time, the major part of the Austro-Hungarian fleet was based in Pola. By 4:30 P.M. of the same day, Nikolaus Horthy de Nagybánya had executed the order of the Emperor.

Afterwards the National Council in Zagreb appointed retired Rear-Admiral Dragutin Prica as the Navy Commissioner and named Captain Janko Vukovich de Podkapelsky as fleet commander.

Although the Italians heard the news about the transfer of the Austro-Hungarian fleet to local Yugoslav representatives, they did not cancel their planned raid on the naval base at Pola. This action was executed during the night of October 31/November 1 when two Italian naval officers succeeded in penetrating by boat the weakly manned defenses of Pola harbor and set mines under the keel of the 23,000-ton dreadnought *Viribus Unitis*, the flagship of Captain Vukovich. In the ensuing explosion the ship sank with some 400 men of her crew, including Captain Vukovich.

Because of the death of the fleet commander and the illness of the Navy's Commissioner, the National Council appointed the former Pola naval base commander, Navy Captain Metodije Koch, as the new Navy Commissioner in command of all naval vessels and establishments in Pola. He was promoted to the rank of rear-admiral on November 2.

The armistice between the allied and associated powers and Austria-Hungary was signed on November 3 but at the insistence of the Italians came into effect a day later. Italy's aim was to occupy as much Austro-Hungarian territory as possible and to be established firmly there before the arrival of the other allied forces. According to the naval terms of the original armistice, Austria-Hungary was obliged to surrender its 42 most modern surface warships and submarines to the allies

and the U.S. The rest of the ships and naval material was to be assembled, disarmed and then put under allied and U.S. supervision in the naval bases of Pola, Split, and the Gulf of Cattaro.

The terms of the armistice with Austria-Hungary were drawn up by all the allies, but in fact, they reflected primarily Italy's interest in strengthening her position in the Adriatic and the western part of the Balkans. The terms of the naval armistice went beyond the need to prevent Austria-Hungary from initiating any new hostilities on the sea. Among Italy's principal objectives was to obtain control over the major part of the Austro-Hungarian fleet. Thus she opposed from the very beginning the placement of the former Austro-Hungarian ships under the control of the National Council in Zagreb.

After the armistice with Austria-Hungary came into effect, the Italian forces moved to occupy the major part of the former Austro-Hungarian coast and offshore islands. By November 5, the Italian Commander of the Upper Adriatic, Vice-Admiral Umberto Cagni, had arrived in Pola and requested that Admiral Koch turn over the former Austro-Hungarian ships and establishments then under Yugoslav control. On November 7, Admiral Cagni informed Koch that the Italian forces had occupied Pola and its vicinity. Two days later all "sailor councils" were dissolved. The Yugoslavs were forced to turn over all former Austro-Hungarian ships to the Italians. The request of Admiral Koch to retain control over four destroyers was rejected by the Allied Naval Council on November 14. Admiral Koch succeeded in obtaining the control of only one yacht (*Lacroma*), but she was to be disarmed by November 25 in Split. In November 1918, by citing the threat of possible sabotage, the Italians convinced the other allies and the U.S. to force all Yugoslav crews to disembark from the former Austro-Hungarian ships. The only exception for the time being was the ships based in the Gulf of Cattaro, where the Yugoslavs were allowed to remain onboard owing to the sympathetic attitude of the local French naval commander. At the beginning of January 1919, there were 35 ships with about 600 Yugoslavs onboard. They disembarked at the request of the Italians in February 1919. Afterwards the decision regarding the ultimate fate of the Austro-Hungarian fleet was left exclusively in the hands of the highest allied and U.S. representatives assembled at the Peace Conference in Versailles.

Formative Years (1918-1923)

The new Yugoslav state, officially known as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom of the SCS), was proclaimed on December 1, 1918. Twenty days later the post of Serbia's Army Minister was abolished and the new post of the Minister of the Army & Navy created instead. The National Council in Zagreb dissolved the hitherto-existing Naval Commissioner's Office in February 1919 and a Navy Department (Mornaricko Odelenje) headed by Admiral Koch was created instead. At the beginning of April 1919 the Navy Section was transferred to Belgrade and became a part of the Ministry of the Army & Navy. The nascent Yugoslav Navy by then comprised a relatively large number of commands and establishments, although there were no ships in service (Figure 1).

The fate of the former Austro-Hungarian fleet was the subject of extensive discussions among the representatives of the allied and associated powers at the Peace Conference in Versailles. The new Yugoslav state was only in conflict with Italy over the extent of its territory in Dalmatia and Istria but also demanded a large share of the former Austro-Hungarian fleet. Italy on her part intended to obtain the commanding position in the Adriatic no matter what the cost. She sought unsuccessfully to acquire a major part of the former Austro-Hungarian coast and offshore islands promised to her according to the terms of the secret Treaty in London signed on April 26, 1915 with the allies. Italy also wanted to deny the Yugoslavs control over the former Austro-Hungarian fleet. Italy's position was undoubtedly stronger than Yugoslavia's because she was one of the great powers and victorious in the war. The Yugoslav position at the Peace Conference in regard to the division of the former Austro-Hungarian fleet was harmed by utterly unrealistic demands in that respect. In April 1919 the Yugoslavs demanded, at a minimum, control over the following ex-Austro-Hungarian warships:[1]

* 4 cruisers
* 17 destroyers
* 27 oceangoing torpedo boats
* 20 completed, plus 17 submarines under construction
* 18 other seagoing ships
* 6 monitors
* 1 river patrol boat and repair ship each
* 150 seaplanes

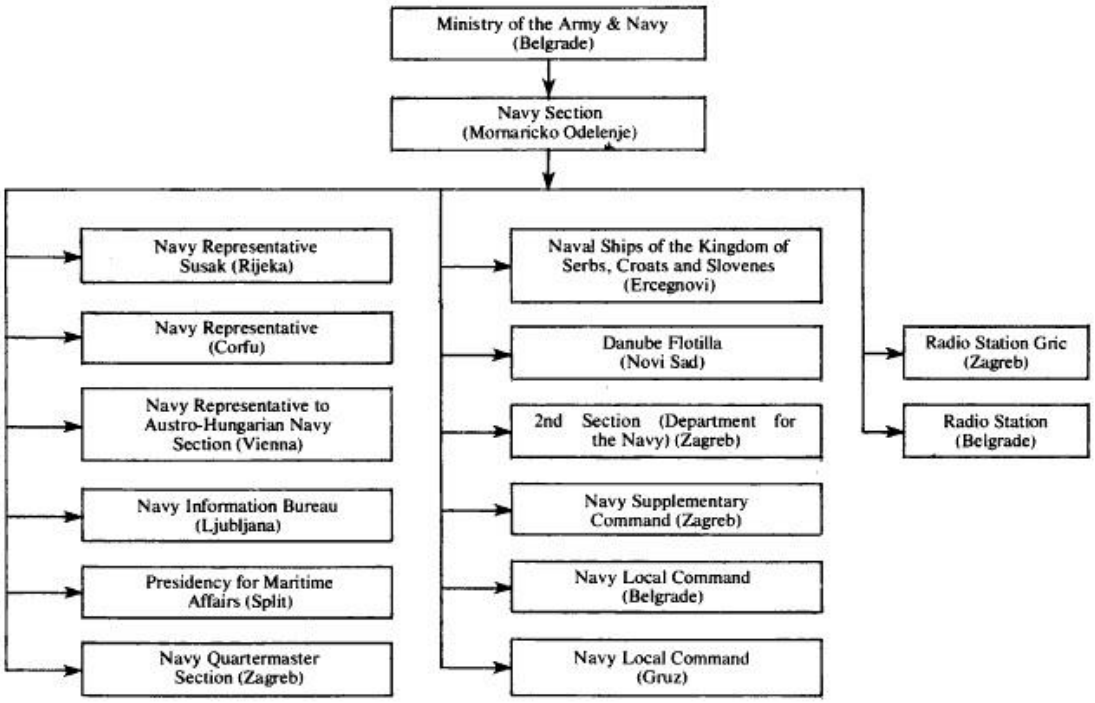
Then in May 1920 the Yugoslav government requested control of[2]

* 2 old cruisers
* 6 destroyers
* 12 250-ton and 12 200-ton oceangoing torpedo boats
* 6 torpedo boats
* 4 submarines
* 25 seaplanes

The Yugoslav request was rejected by the allies and the U.S. because the Peace Conference's Supreme Council decided the fate of the former Austro-Hungarian fleet at its session held on December 9, 1919. The final peace treaty with Austria-Hungary, which included provisions on the division of the fleet, was not signed until October 1920 at St. Germain. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes then was allocated the following former Austro-Hungarian warships:

* one 6,900-ton local defense battleship *Erzherzog Kronprinz Rudolf*
* four 78-80-ton *Schichau*-class torpedo boats (ex-No. 19, 21, 36, 38)
* four 210-ton *Kaiman*-class seagoing torpedo boats (ex-54T, 60T, 61T, 69F)
* four 262-ton *T-group* oceangoing torpedo boats (ex-76T, 77T, 78T, 79T)
* four 250-ton *F-Group* oceangoing torpedo boats (ex-87F, 93F, 96F, 97F)
* one 2,150-ton repair ship *Cyclop*

Figure 1: THE YUGOSLAV NAVY, April 1919


Ministry of the Army & Navy (Belgrade)
Navy Section (Mornaricko Odelenje)
Navy Representative Susak (Rijeka)
Navy Representative (Corfu)
Navy Representative to Austro-Hungarian Navy Section (Vienna)
Navy Information Bureau (Ljubljana)
Presidency for Maritime Affairs (Split)
Navy Quartermaster Section (Zagreb)
Naval Ships of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Ercegnovi)
Danube Flotilla (Novi Sad)
2nd Section (Department for the Navy) (Zagreb)
Navy Supplementary Command (Zagreb)
Navy Local Command (Belgrade)
Navy Local Command (Gruz)
Radio Station Gric (Zagreb)
Radio Station (Belgrade)

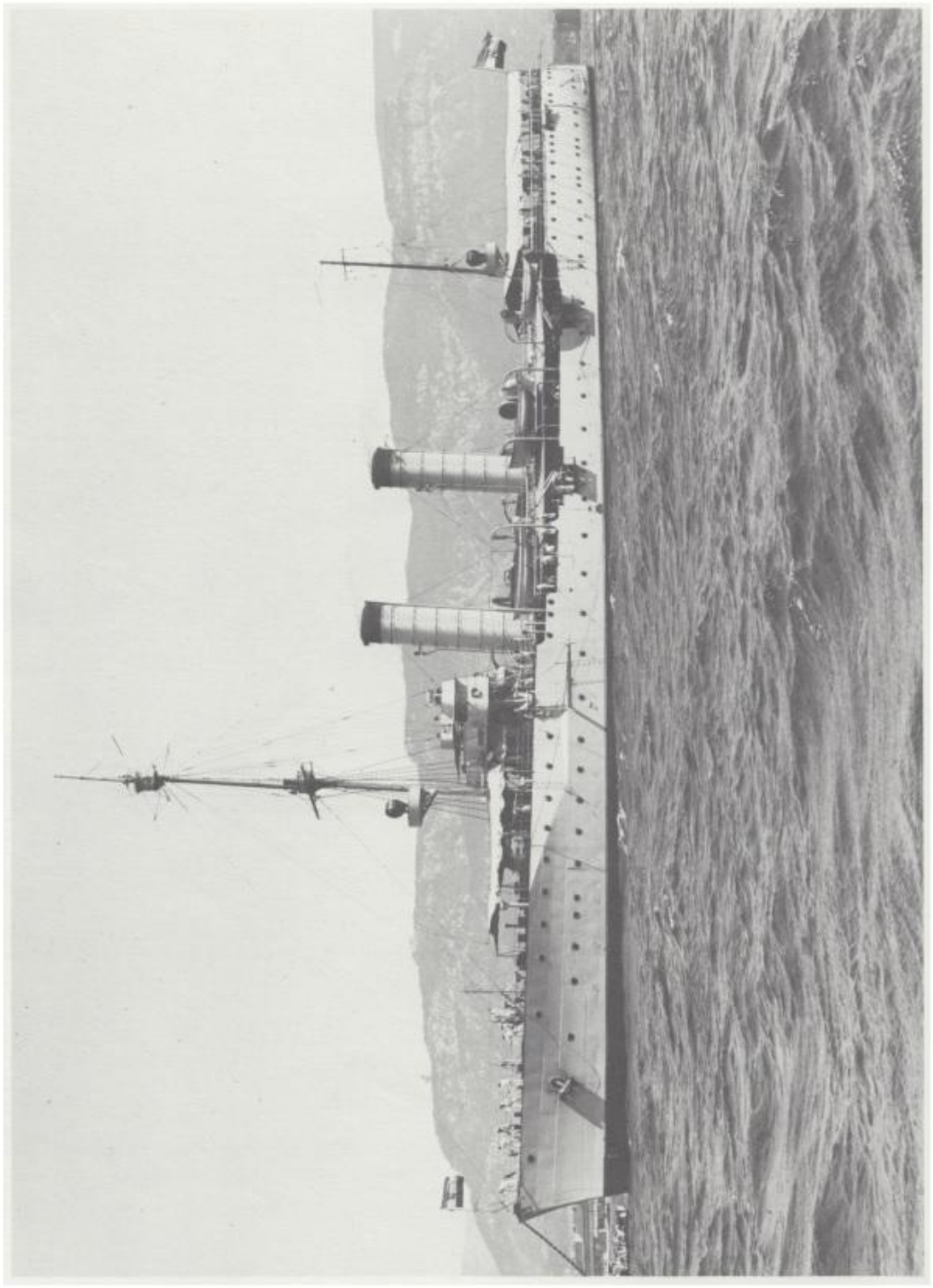
* two water carriers (*Najade, Nixe*)
* one 265-ton salvage vessel *Gigant*
* three tugs (205-ton T.200, 147-ton T.162, 101-ton T.102)
* one 260-ton yacht *Dalmat*
* four hulks (*Aurora, Donau, Frundsberg, Kaiser Max*)
* four Danube monitors (448-ton *Körös*, 440-ton *Bodrog*, 550-ton *Enns*, 580-ton *Bosna* [ex-*Temes*])
* one 25-ton motor launch "*d*"
* three river tugs
* sixteen small 20-35-ton tenders and numerous 200-600-ton coal and oil lighters

These ships were taken over by the Yugoslavs at the beginning of March 1921.

The Versailles Peace Conference and later the Rapallo Treaty of 1921 brought about the final decision in regard to delimitation of territories in Dalmatia and Istria between the Kingdom of SCS and Italy. The latter did not succeed in obtaining the large part of Dalmatia which was promised to her according to the Treaty of London, although Italy succeeded in acquiring all Istria and the town of Zara with its vicinity. In January 1924 Yugoslavia formally recognized that Fiume (Rijeka) was to belong to Italy. The length of the coastline of the new state, which remained unchanged until the outbreak of World War II, extended for some 350 miles. Yugoslavia also had control of over 600 offshore islands, with the notable exception of Lagosta (Lastovo) and Pelagosa (Palagruza), which were allotted to Italy.

The Yugoslav Navy underwent numerous changes in the first few years after it was formally created. The hitherto-existing Serbian Supreme Command was abolished on May 6, 1920, and the Main General Staff (Glavni Djeneral Stab) established instead. The Navy Section afterwards became part of the Operations Bureau of the General Staff. Among the most important tasks of the Navy Department was to organize naval personnel. At first a large number of former Austro-Hungarian officers and men were admitted into the navy. By the end of 1919 some 270 former officers had been commissioned.[3] The average age of these officers was 25 to 30 years. Some 90 percent of them were Croatian and Slovene nationality, while the rest were either Serbs or non-Slavs (mostly Germans). Their ranks in the former Austro-Hungarian Navy were recognized. The rank insignias and regulations were the same as in the former Navy.

The first Yugoslav Navy regulations came into effect in November 1920. On March 23, 1923 a new regulation of the composition of the Yugoslav General Staff established a Navy Section (Mornaricki Odsek) to replace the hitherto-existing Navy Department. The first law of the army and navy which came into effect in September, 1923 envisaged that the navy was to comprise (1) a fleet (2) a river flotilla and (3) naval aviation. Finally the Naval Command (Komanda Mornarice) was established on September 17, 1923 with its seat in Zemun (near Belgrade). Afterwards the Navy Section was responsible for purely admin-



The Yugoslav Navy purchased the German light cruiser Niobe *in 1926, renaming the ship* Dalmacija. *This photograph shows* Dalmacija *at Toulon, France, during 1930.* Copyright Marius Bar (address 491 Avenue Marceau, 83100 Toulon).

istrative matters, while the Navy Command controlled all fleet units in the operational chain of command. This organization was to remain unchanged until 1929.

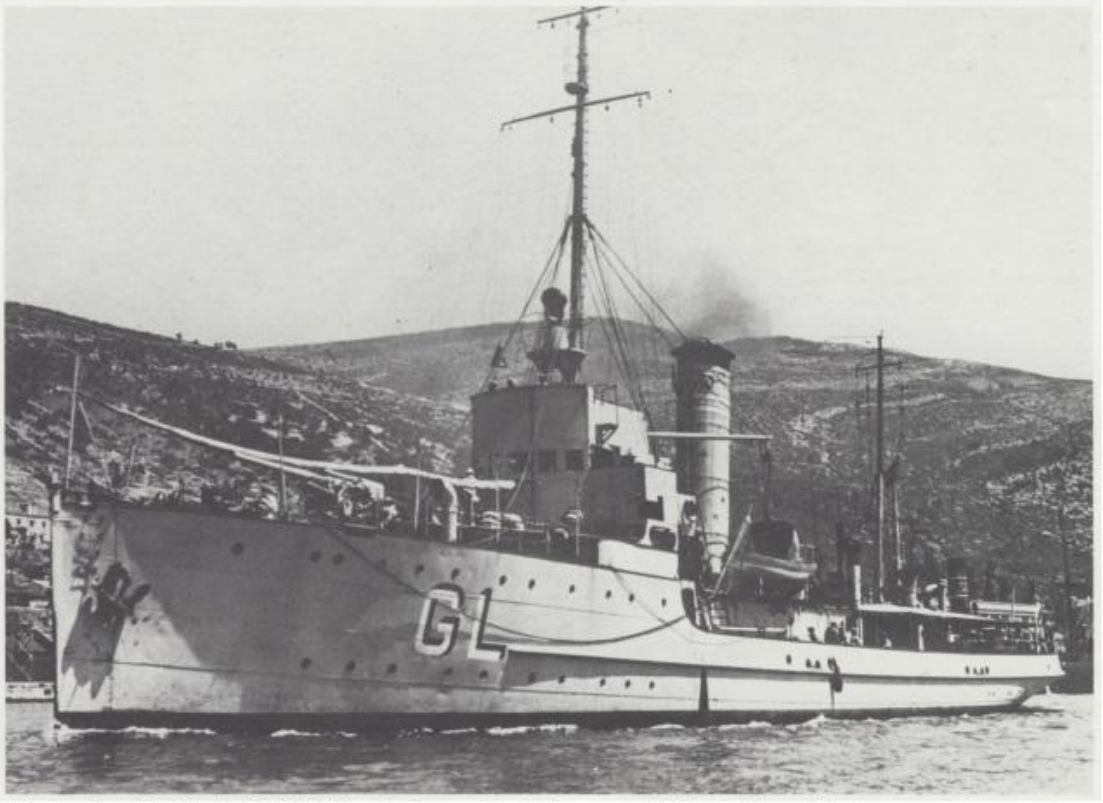
The first fleet expansion program drawn up in 1922 was overly ambitious because it envisioned (clearly beyond the country's capability to acquire and maintain) a fleet comprising some 24 destroyers, 24 submarines, and a large number of minelayers and seaplanes. None of these plans, of course, was realized. By the end of 1923 the Navy of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes consisted of:[4]

* eight 250-ton oceangoing torpedo boats T.1–T.8 (ex-76T, 77T, 78T, 79T, 87T, 95T, 96T, 97F)
* four 210-ton oceangoing torpedo boats T.9–t.12 (ex-60T, 61T, 69T, 69F)
* six 550-ton mine tenders *Galeb*-class
* four *Schichau*-class minesweepers D.2–D.4 (ex-TB No. 21, 36, 38 & 19)
* one water carrier *Perun* (ex-*Cyclop*)
* two yachts *Vila* (ex-*Dalmat*) and *Lada* (ex-*Quarnero*)
* one 326-ton training ship *Vila Velebita*
* one salvage ship *Moćni* (ex-*Gigant*)
* four tugs

Many former Austro-Hungarian ships were scrapped after only a few years in service. The old local defense battleship *Kumbor* (ex-*Erz. Kronprinz Rudolf*) was sold for scrap in 1922. All four minesweepers except one (D.2) reportedly were discarded in 1924, as were four hulks: *Skradin* (ex-*Aurora*), *Sibenik* (ex-*Donau*), *Zlarin* (ex-*Frundsberg*), and *Tivat* (ex-*Kaiser Max*).

The river flotilla comprised four monitors: *Vardar* (ex-*Bosna*), *Drava* (ex-*Enns*) *Sava* (ex-*Bodrog*) and *Morava* (ex-*Körös*); two 25-35-ton motor patrol boats (V.1–2); and three river tugs.

The Yugoslav Navy's personnel in 1922 consisted of 124 officers and about 3,000 men.[5] The decrease in the number of officers from the 1919 level resulted from the voluntary departure of many disillusioned former officers. In order to fill the officers' ranks, the first group of 20 lieutenants graduated from the military academy in Belgrade were transferred to the navy in 1921. Following a one-year course onboard a minesweeper and practical cruises, 12 of them were promoted to the rank of ensign (porucnik korvete). Another group of such officers was transferred to the navy a year later. Then in 1923 the first class of 40 midshipmen began their three-year training in the newly-established Naval Academy at Gruz (near Dubrovnik). The future midshipmen were to be between 17 and 20 years of age and graduates of a high school or corresponding nautical school. In order to be



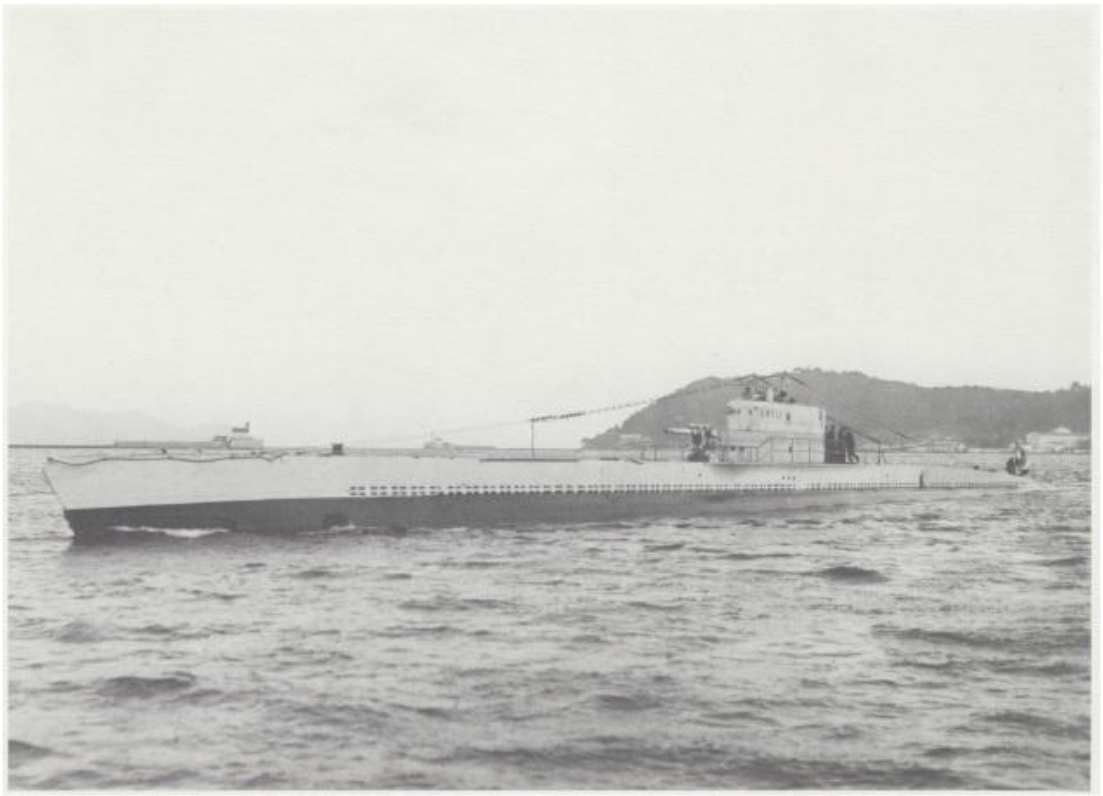
***The Yugolsav Mine Tender* Galeb, *built as the German Navy's minesweeper* M100. *Six ships of this class were sold to Yugoslavia on 20 July 1921. The date of this photograph is unknown.* Copyright Marius Bar, Toulon, France.**

***The submarine* Osvetnik, *probably photographed in French waters soon after completion. Three of the four submarines fell into Italian hands in WW II and were lost but one*—Nebojsa—*escaped and remained in service into the late 1950s.* Photograph copyright Marius Bar.**

admitted to the Naval Academy they were obliged to pass a stiff entrance examination. After 1923, of an average of 80–90 applicants per year, only 20–25 were admitted, and approximately 15 of the latter graduated and were promoted in the rank of "porucnik korvete." The new officers were then obliged to serve six years in active service after which they were to choose a naval career or to be transferred into the reserve.

For the deck specialty petty officers, a two-year school was established in a newly built barracks on the Mandalina Peninsula (Sibenik). The cadets were to be between 16–19 years of age and graduates of eight years of elementary school. The machinist's school was opened in Kumbor (Gulf of Cattaro). Both petty officer schools, but especially the one in Kumbor, enjoyed excellent reputations, because the standards of theoretical and practical training were extremely high. Mine and torpedo specialty training was conducted at the Underwater Weapons Command in Djenovich. A control torpedo-launching station in Djenovich was also part of that command. The pilot's and air observer's school was established in Djenovich. The artillery school was opened in Meljine (Gulf of Cattaro), providing training for ship's gunnery officers and men. The personnel of the naval communication and signal service were trained at Sibernik, the site of the main coastal radio station. Finally a Seamen Corps Command was established at Sibenik which provided both basic and specialist training for enlisted men.

Concurrently with the establishment and organization of naval commands and the fleet, the shore establishment inherited from the former Austro-Hungarian Navy was modernized and expanded. The former subsidiary of the Navy Yard Pola in Tivat (Gulf of Cattaro), known as "Arsenal," was expanded so as to enable it to repair and overhaul larger naval vessels. Two floating docks (one of 2,000-ton and the other of 7,000-ton capacity) were acquired. The worker's apprentice school and diving school were also established in Tivat. The main naval supply center, directly subordinate to the Arsenal, and commissary were established there as well. A private shipyard, Yarrows Adriatic Works in Kraljevica, was modernized by the acquisition of one 2,000-ton floating dock. A large shipyard subsidiary of the French Chantier de Loire of St. Nazaire was established in Split. It had two floating docks, one of 1,800-ton and another of 8,000-ton capacity. The monitors and tenders of the river flotilla were usually overhauled at Sartid Works in Smederevo, while repairs were conducted in the Arsenal's subsidiary set up in Novi Sad.



The submarine **Smeli**, *probably photographed in French waters soon after completion. The first two Yugoslav submarines,* **Hrabri** *and* **Nebojsa**, *arrived at Cattaro on 8 April 1928, accompanied by the depot ship* **Hvar**. *The two French-built units arrived about two years later.* **Photograph copyright Marius Bar.**

The First Phase (1923-29)

For the first few years after 1923, the development of the Yugoslav Navy was not as fast as it should have been considering that the country possessed a very favorable maritime position. There were many reasons for this situation. One undoubtedly was the lack of funds due to the weak state of the country's finances in the years following the unification. Perhaps more important was that the navy did not enjoy great influence among the highest Yugoslav officials, who were land-minded and had little if any interest in or understanding of naval matters. The navy also had scant support among the public, although a Navy League (Jadranska Straza) was established to promote the interest of the country's population in maritime pursuits and the navy. Its activities were very similar to the Austrian Flottenverein. The army was dominated by Serbian generals who treated the navy as a luxury item, perhaps important as a symbol, but in which the investments were not to be recovered. Such an attitude was reflected in the navy's share of the defense budget. For example, in 1922/23 Yugoslavia's naval expenditures amounted to only some 76 million dinars, while those of the army were 1.05 billion dinars.[6]

Despite all these problems the navy was able to purchase its first large surface combatant, a 2,360-ton German small cruiser *Dalmacija* (ex-*Niobe*) in 1926. She was extensively refitted and rearmed in Tivat's Arsenal before being commissioned. Afterwards *Dalmacija* carried six 83mm./L35 AA Skoda guns. Then in 1927 two 15-ton Thornycroft motor torpedo boats (MTB), later known as the *Uskok*-class (*Uskok, Cetnik*), were built in England. A base for the torpedo boats was established in Sibenik. Among the most significant additions to the fleet were two 975-ton *Hrabri*-class submarines, built in 1927 by Armstrong and similar to the British *L*-class. An additional two 630-ton *Smeli*-class units were built at the Chantier de Loire in Nantes and commissioned in December 1928 and February 1929 respectively. In their main features the *Smeli*-class resembled the French *Diane*-class. In 1927 the 2,650-ton *Hvar* (ex-*Solun*) was purchased as a submarine depot ship. The submarine station was established then in Tivat.

A number of former Austro-Hungarian naval vessels still in service were discarded. All four 210-ton *Kaiman*-class (T.9–T.12) were scrapped between 1928 and 1930. In 1929 the salvage ship *Mocni* (ex-*Gigant*) was scrapped. The 740-ton *Spasilac* was built by the German Howaldt Werke as a replacement.

The Yugoslav Navy also underwent some organizational changes after the mid-1920s. The most significant

among them was that the Navy Command and Navy Section were merged and became a part of the Ministry of the Army & Navy on December 6, 1929. The Navy Commander afterwards held the rank of full admiral while his deputy was a vice-admiral. The Navy Command then comprised eight sections, of which the most important were: operations, naval aviation, personnel and maritime-technical.

The naval aviation school was transferred from Djenovich in Divulje (near Split) in December 1928. Also a new seaplane station was set up in Divulje. The smaller seaplane station in Djenovich became subordinate to the Third Naval Aviation Command with its seat in Divulje. A new 1,870-ton seaplane depot ship, *Zmaj* was acquired in Germany in 1928.

The coal for the larger surface ships was imported from England as it had been in the Austro-Hungarian Navy. Smaller units used domestic coal extracted from the Kakanj (Bosnia) and Trbovlje (Slovenia) mines.

At the end of 1929 the Yugoslav Navy comprised 29 combatants and ten auxiliaries. The fleet was composed of:

* one small cruiser (*Dalmacija*)
* eight 250-ton oceangoing torpedo boats (*T.1–T.8*)
* two MTBs (*Usok*-class)
* four submarines (2 *Smeli*-, 2 *Hrabri*-class)
* six mine tenders (*Galeb*-class)
* one minesweeper (*D.2*)
* one submarine depot ship (*Hvar*)
* one training ship (*Sitnica*)
* two yachts (*Vila, Lada*)
* five tugs (*Jaki, Silni, Snazni, Ustrajni, Marljivi*)

The river flotilla consisted of four monitors and one river auxiliary ship (*Srbija*).

The navy personnel consisted of 256 officers and 2,000 men, while 164 officers and 570 men were in the trained reserve.[7] In 1927 the navy had 278 officers, of whom 118 were former Austro-Hungarian officers. By then only 20 lieutenants and 29 ensigns had completed school in the country.[8]

The Last Decade (1930-1940)

The country entered into a new and uncertain phase of its internal development in January 1929, after Yugoslavia's King Alexander dissolved the parliament and forbade all political party activity. The Kingdom of SCS officially became the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The navy then changed its name into the Royal Yugoslav Navy (RYN).

After 1930 the navy was able to expand and modernize the fleet, although its share of the defense budget remained, on the average, 15 percent. The largest unit acquired was the 1,880-ton flotilla leader *Dubrovnik*. She was built by Yarrow at Glasgow and commissioned in 1931. By then five new 127-ton *Malinska*-class minelayers built by the Yarrows Adriatic Works in Kraljevica had entered service. A new 720-ton sailing training ship (brigantine) *Jadran*, built by the Blohm & Voss shipyard (Hamburg), was delivered in 1932. Four years later eight 60-ton *Orjen*-class MTBs built by the Luerssen shipyard (Vegesack) were commissioned. Also in 1936 a new naval coastal command (Pomorska Obalska Komanda) headed by a rear-admiral was set up in Split, to which three then-existing shore-based commands at Selce, Sibenik and Djenovich were subordinate.

At the end of 1936 the RYN comprised 31 combatants and about a dozen auxiliary vessels. The navy personnel stood at 487 officers and some 5,000 men.[9] The fleet then consisted of:

* one small cruiser *Dalmacija*
* one flotilla leader *Dubrovnik*
* four submarines (2 *Smeli*-, 2 *Hrabi*-class)
* eight 250-ton oceangoing torpedo boats (*T.1–T.8*)
* two MTBs (*Uskok*-class)
* five minelayers (*Malinska*-class)
* six minelayers (*Galeb*-class)
* one aviation depot ship (*Zmaj*)
* two submarine depot ships (*Hvar, Sitnica*)
* one sailing training ship (*Jadran*)
* one yacht (*Vila*)
* one salvage ship (*Spasilac*)
* one water carrier (*Lovcen*)
* five tugs

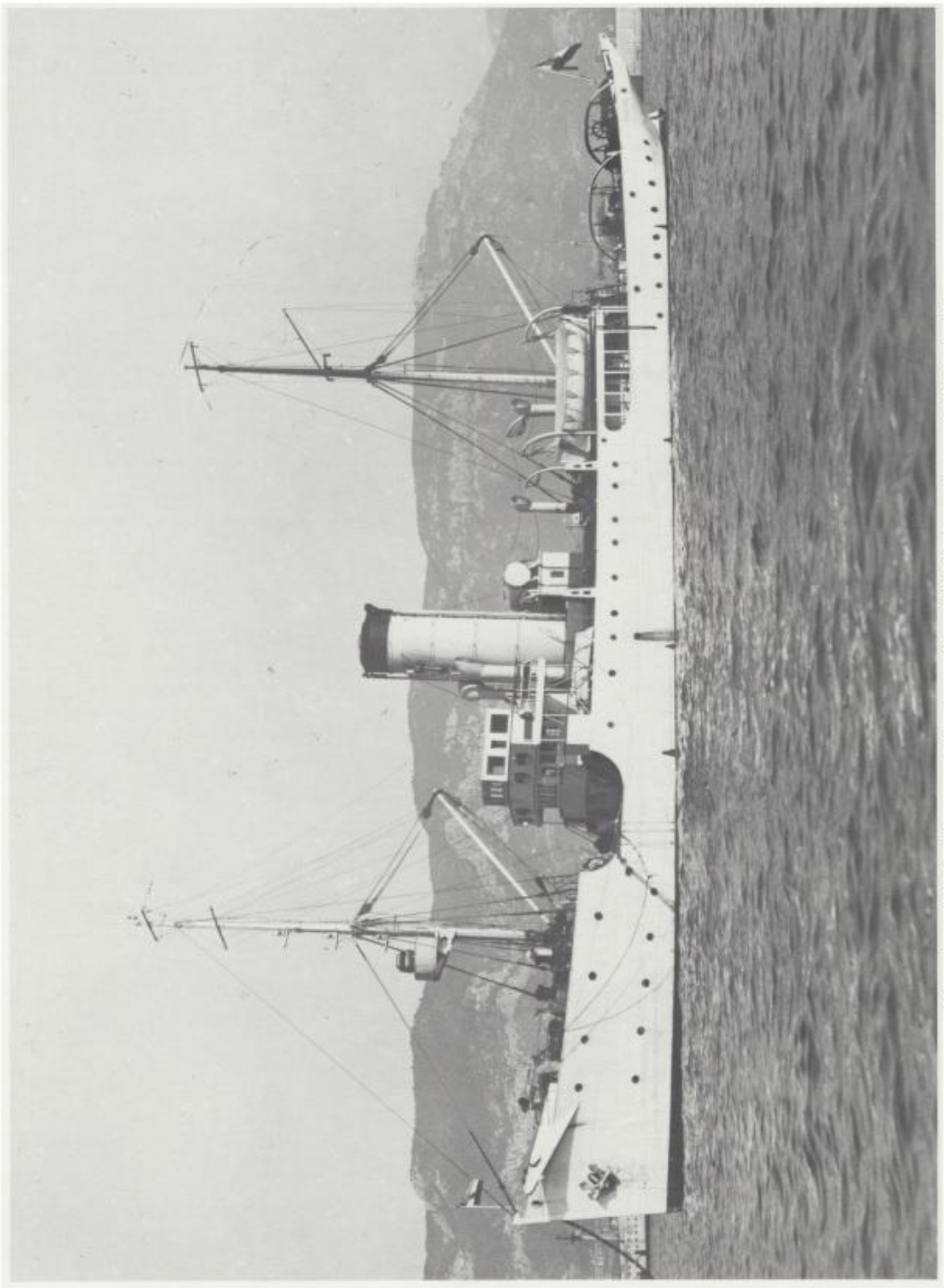
The river flotilla was comprised of four monitors (*Vardar, Drava, Sava, Morava*), one royal yacht (*Dragor*), two patrol boats (*Granicar, Strazar*), and three river tugs (*Cer, Triglav, Avala*).

Naval aviation consisted, in 1939, of about 96 seaplanes, of which 62 were intended for cooperation with the fleet, while the rest served for training purposes.[10] There were four reconnaissance squadrons including *Fizir*-type seaplanes produced domestically by the *Zmaj* factory in Zemun. Three bomber squadrons were composed of German Dornier *Do-D* and *Do-Wal* seaplanes. Naval aviation personnel strength in 1936 was 1,025 men, of whom 135 were pilots.[11]

In 1936 the only units ready for war service were the destroyer *Dubrovnik* and four submarines. The navy was considered to be suitable only for patrol duties and coastal surveillance, minelaying and minor raids against enemy shipping. The U.S. military attache in Belgrade then observed that the "discipline and morale of navy personnel was very good. The men are contented and like their life." However, "higher commanders appear somewhat discouraged at the inferior position of the Yugoslav Navy due to totally inadequate appropriations." In his view, "under such conditions the fleet units kept in service may be said to be in very good condition considering the small amount available for upkeep and training." [12]

The fleet was strengthened in 1937–38 by the addition of three destroyers. Then the 1,240-ton destroyer *Beograd*, built in St. Nazaire, and two destroyers of the same class (*Zagreb, Ljubljana*), built in Split, entered into service. Also in 1937 new teletype lines (Hughes machines) were completed, linking the Navy Command in Zemun with major shore-based commands in Selce, Split, Sibernik and Novi Sad. Also Split was then connected with the naval aviation command in Divulje, and Djenovich with the Arsenal in Tivat and the radio station in Klinci.

The 2,400-ton destroyer *Split* was laid down in 1939 in the Split shipyard. However, she was only half completed at the beginning of the war in April 1941. Also the RYN ordered two coastal *Type II B* sub-



The salvage ship **Spasilac**, *seen at Toulon on 8 Jan. 1935.* **Photograph copyright Marius Bar.**

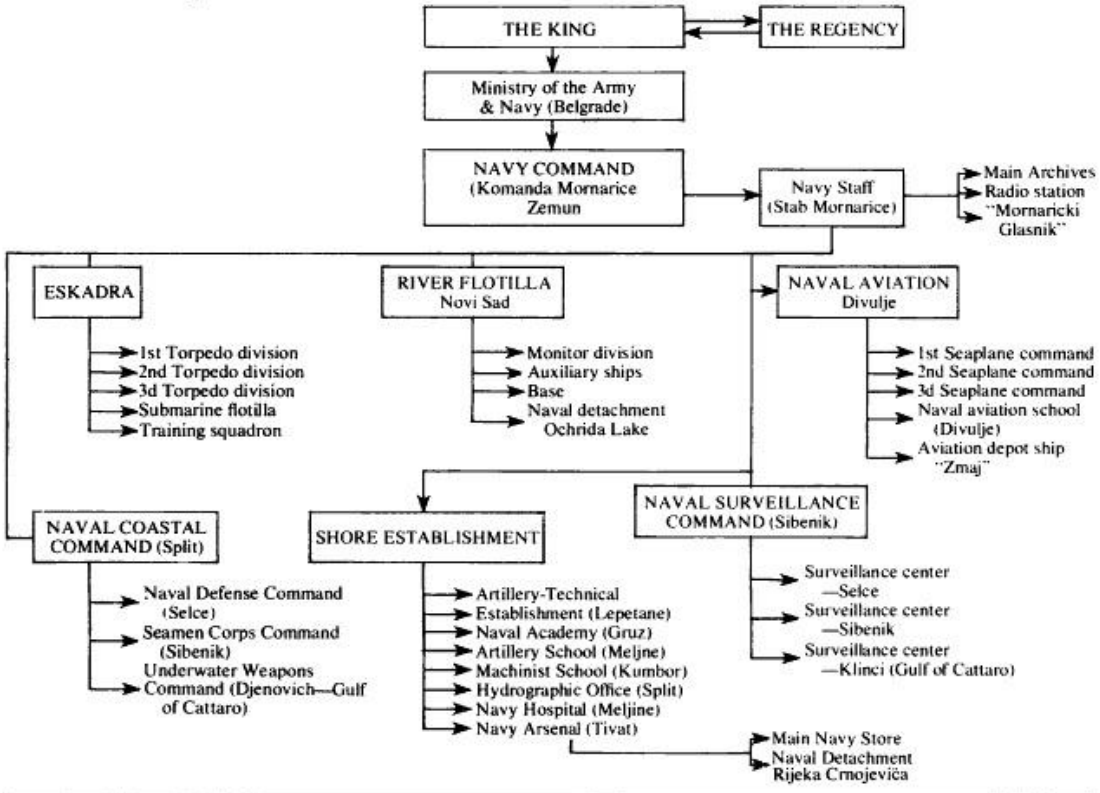
marines in Germany; however, because of the outbreak of the war, they were not delivered. The RYN suffered a temporary loss in January 1940 when the destroyer *Ljubljana* accidentally sank at the entrance of Sibenik's harbor. She was later raised and sent to be repaired in the Tivat Arsenal, but was still there when the war came in April 1941.

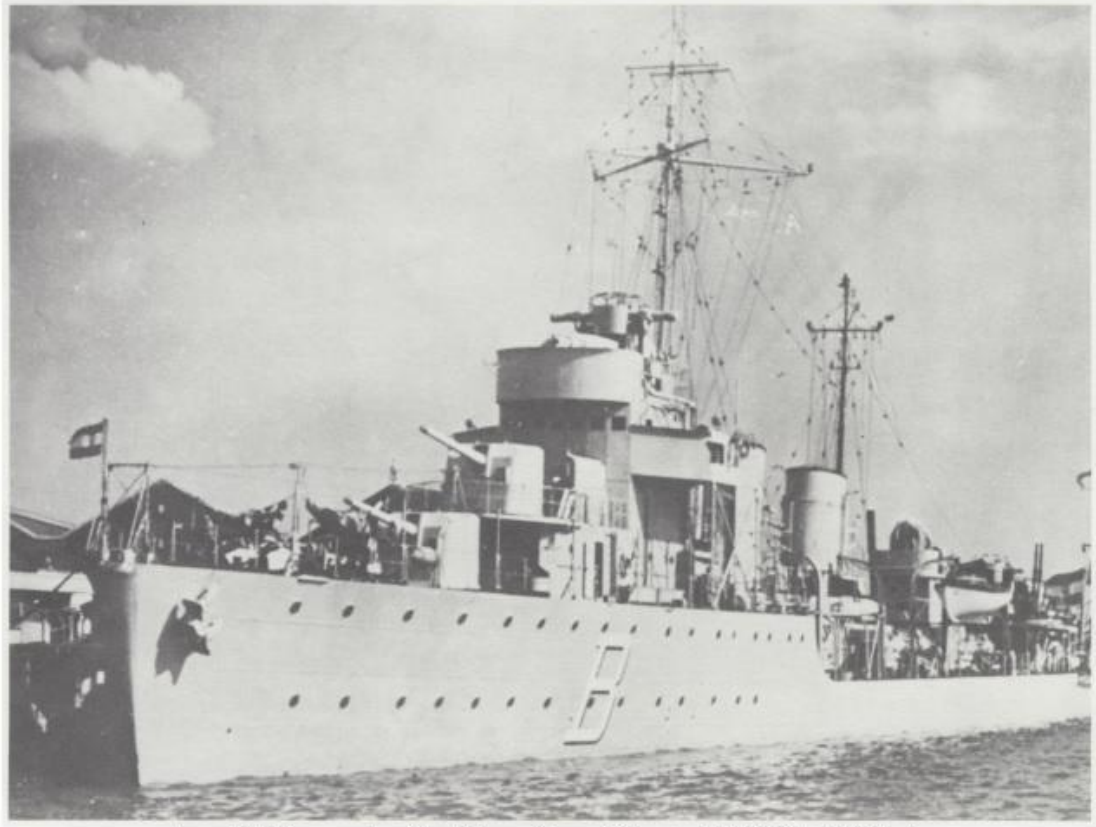
The Navy In 1941

The peacetime organization of the RYN remained essentially unchanged after 1929 and until 1941. Directly subordinate to the Navy Staff (Stab Mornarice) in Zemun were (1) the Eskadra (2) the river flotilla (3) naval aviation (4) the naval coastal command in Split and (5) the shore establishment (Figure 2). The major part of the fleet belonged in peacetime to the so-called Eskadra. The composition of the Eskadra varied. After 1938 it usually comprised three torpedo divisions (destroyers, oceangoing torpedo boats and MTBs), one submarine flotilla and a training squadron. In the summer training period the Eskadra had maximum strength. The minelayers which normally were subordinate to the naval coastal command were then attached to the Eskadra. Also, seaplane squadrons were often attached to it for joint tactical exercises. The naval aviation command controlled three seaplane commands, a naval aviation school and some auxiliary vessels. Each of the seaplane commands comprised two groups, each with a total of four seaplane squadrons. The naval coastal command comprised three sectors: the Northern, or Naval Defense Command (Selce); the central, or Seaman Corps Command (Sibenik), and the Southern, or Underwater Weapon Command (Djenovich). The Naval Surveillance Command (Mornaricka izvidnicka komanda) in Sibenik consisted of three surveillance centers with seats in Selce, Sibenik and Klinci (Gulf of Cattaro). Each of the centers consisted of a number of signal and observation stations along the coast and outlying islands.

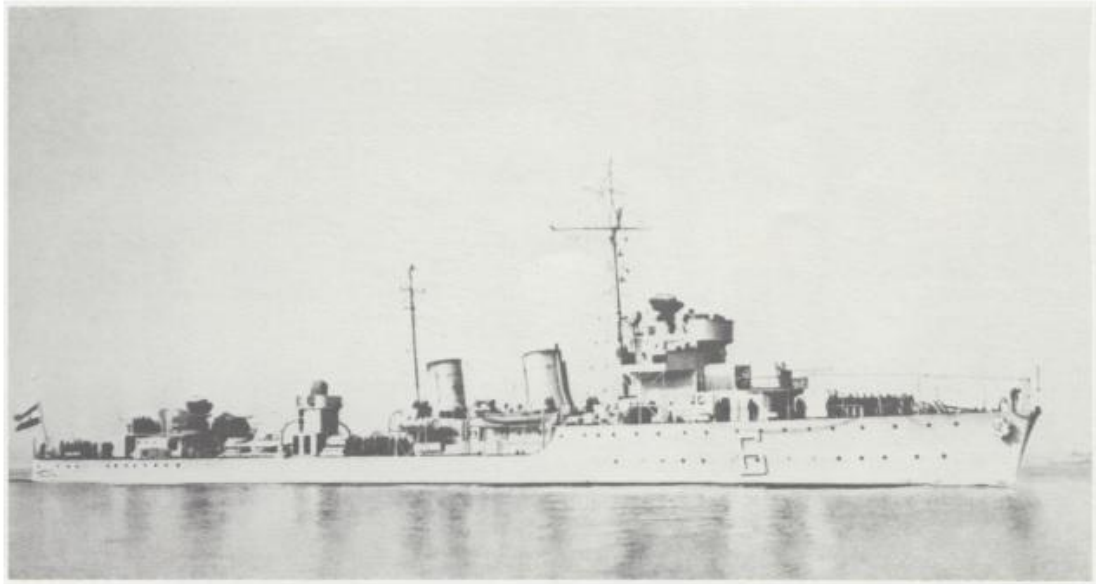
In case of national emergency or war, the Navy Command was to become directly subordinate to the Supreme Command in Belgrade, while the Navy Section was to become part of the Ministry of the Army & Navy. Directly under the Navy Command were to come (1) the fleet (ex-Eskadra) (2) the river flotilla (3) naval aviation and (4) the naval coastal command. All other naval establishments and schools were to be subordinate to the Navy Section (Figure 3). There were exceptions, however. The navy detachment on Ochrida Lake, formerly under the river flotilla, was to be subordinate to the Third Army District, while the navy detachment on the Crnojevici River (Scutari Lake),

Figure 2: THE ROYAL YUGOSLAV NAVY: Peacetime Organization, 1940



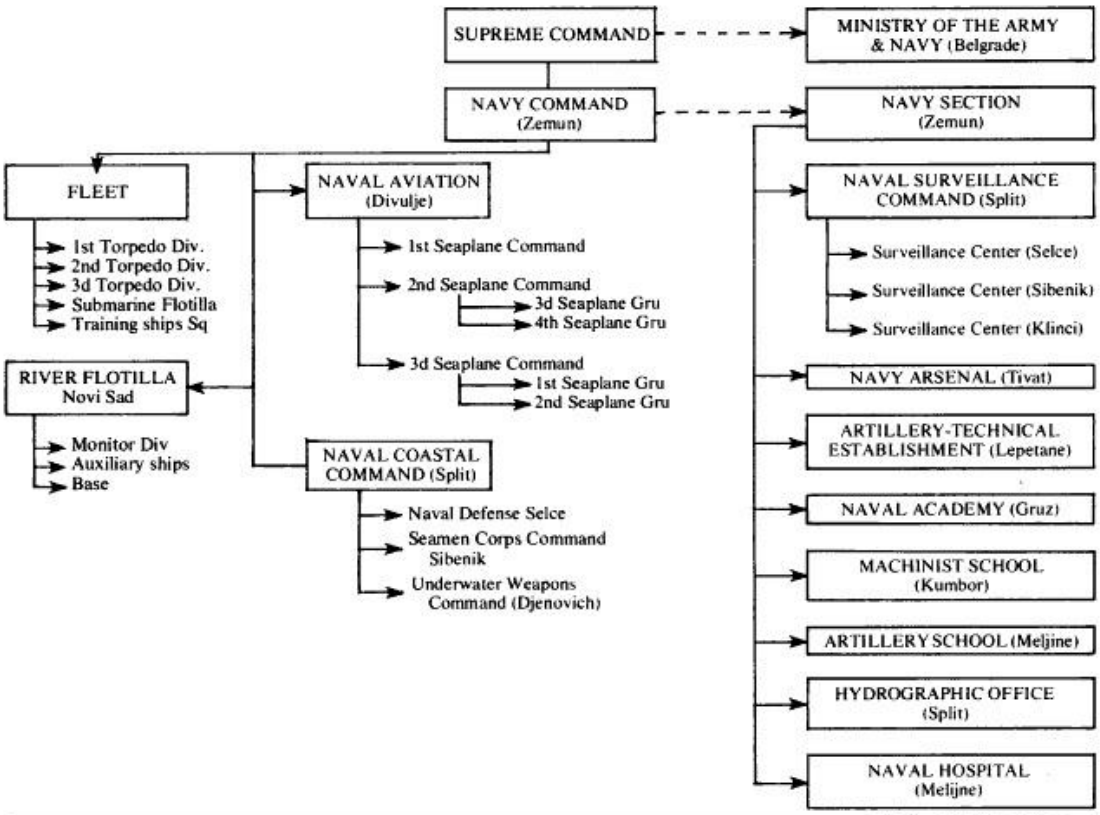


An undated, pre-war view of the destroyer **Beograd. Courtesy C. W. Beilstein Collection.**



An undated, pre-war view of destroyer **Beograd. Courtesy C. W. Beilstein Collection.**

Figure 3: THE ROYAL YUGOSLAV NAVY: Wartime Organization, 1941



in peacetime subordinate to the Arsenal in Tivat, was to come under the command of the Second Army District. Also, with respect to the closure of the country's border, the naval coastal command in Split was to become subordinate to the Littoral Army District (Primorska Armijska Oblast) in Mostar (Herzegovina). In case of mobilization, it was planned that the navy would requisition some 250 seagoing and 25 river commercial vessels.

The RYN at the beginning of 1941 comprised 41 combatants and some 19 auxiliaries. The fleet then consisted of (Figure 4). It was in fact divided into two groups: (1) Ships intended for peacetime training, for carrying supplies and for minelaying in case of mobilization or war. This included the cruiser *Dalmacija*, six *Galeb*-class mine tenders, six 250-ton oceangoing torpedo boats, five *Malinska*-class minelayers, and the auxiliary ships *Jadran*, *Zmaj*, *Hvar* and *Sitnica*. (2) The part of the fleet intended for offensive and defensive tasks, which included one flotilla leader *Dubrovnik*, three destroyers *Beograd*-class, four submarines, and eight *Orjen*-class and two *Uskok*-class MTBs.

The most modern ships were the three *Beograd*-class destroyers. The 250-ton oceangoing torpedo boats were seaworthy but sensitive to fire because of their gasoline engines. The steam-powered torpedo boats were of small combat value, although they had been modernized. The sole cruiser *Dalmacija*, built in 1899, was obsolescent but could be used for the defense of naval bases, having a relatively strong AA armament. Only the two *Smeli*-class submarines were regarded as fully combat-ready.

Naval aviation consisted of some 150 seaplanes, of which 120 were intended for combat while the rest were used for training. The combat seaplanes were mostly German Dornier *Do-H*, *Do-Wal* and *Do-D* types. Only the *Do-H* were relatively modern. Although torpedo-carrying seaplane squadrons existed formally, there were no air-launched torpedoes in service. Tests with such torpedoes were conducted with a *Do-D* seaplane in 1939 but, being unsuccessful, were not resumed. In addition there were several seaplanes of domestic construction such as the *SIM-14*. The seaplane trainers included a motley collection of domestically produced *SIM-10/-12*, *PVT*, *Ikarus*, and the coastal reconnaissance seaplane *IO*, and foreign-built seaplanes such as De Havilland, Heinkel, Fizir and Herriot types.

The Yugoslav Navy List 1941

Cruisers (Krstarice)
Dalmacija (ex-*Niobe*)

Destroyers (Razaraci)
Dubrovnik
Beograd
Zagreb
Ljubljana

Submarines (Podmornice)
Hrabri
Nebojsa
Smeli
Osvetnik

Ocean-going Torpedo Boats (Torpiljarke)
T.1 (ex-76T)
T.3 (ex-78T)
T.5 (ex-87F)
T.6 (ex-95F)
T.7 (ex-96F)
T.8 (ex-97F)

Motor Torpedo Boats (Borbeni Camci)
Orjen
Velebit
Dinara
Triglav
Suvobor
Rudnik
Kajmakcalan
Durmitor
Uskok
Cetnik

Minelayers (Tenderi Minopolagaci)
Malinska
Mljet
Meljine
Marjan
Mosor

Mine Tenders (Minonosci)
Galeb (ex-M 100)
Jastreb (ex-M 112)
Orao (ex-M 97)
Sokol (ex-M 144)
Kobac (ex-M 121)
Labud (ex-M 106)

River Monitors (Recni monotori)
Vardar (ex-*Bosna*)
Drava (ex-*Enns*)
Sava (ex-*Bodrog*)
Morava (ex-*Körös*)

River Patrol Boats (Recni patrolni camci)
Strazar
Granicar

Aviation Depot Ship (Matica za pomorsko vazduhoplovstvo)
Zmaj

Submarine Depot Ship (Matica za podmornice)
Hvar (ex-*Solum*, ex-*Unitale*)
Sitnica (ex-*Najade*)

Salvage Ship (Brod za spasavanje)
Spasilac

Patrol Vessel (Patrolni brod)
Beli Orao

Yachts (Jahte)
Vila (ex-*Dalmat*)
Dragor

Training Ships (Skolski brodovi)
Jadran
D.2 (ex-*TB 36*)

Tankers (Tankeri)
Perun

Water Carriers (Vodonosci)
Lovcen

Tugs (Remorkeri)
Jaki
Silni (ex-*T.200*)
Snazni (ex-*T.105*)
Ustranjni (ex-*T.162*)
Marljivi (ex-*Vermach*)

River Tugs (Recni remorkeri)
Cer
Sabac (ex-*Avala*)
Sisak (ex-*Triglav*)

Personnel and Training

The navy personnel at the beginning of 1940 consisted of 326 officers, 1,646 petty officers and 1,870 seamen. At that time 64 former Austro-Hungarian officers (1 VADM, 27 CAPT, 27 Senior CDR, 5 CDR) were still in service, while 336 officers were educated in the Yugoslav schools after 1918 (14 CDR, 110 LCDR, 27 ensigns).[13]

The main source of officers remained the naval academy in Gruz. In the rank of corvette lieutenant (the lowest officer rank) were promoted (1) graduates of the naval academy in Gruz, or (2) those of some corresponding foreign school who held Yugoslav citizenship. Another category of officers was the so-called "strucni potporucnici" (literally "professional ensigns") or warrant officers. Such ranks were open to petty officers with at least nine years in active service who had passed the required examination after being recommended for the warrant officer rank by their superiors and fulfilled special preconditions (unmarried, not older than 35 years, etc.).

The officers belonged to two main categories: (1) unrestricted line (vojno-pomorski oficiri) and (2) restricted line (strucni oficiri). The restricted line officers were divided into three branches: (1) economic (2) medical, and (3) technical. In the technical branch, there were three officer specialties: (1) engineer (2) machine, and (3) technical clerk. The engineers were usually college graduates with B.A. degrees in engineering or those officers who during a two-year active service showed exceptional aptitude for service in that field. The machine specialty in turn had two subspecialties: (1) engine, and (2) electro. Promoted to machine specialty officers were petty officers with at least nine years of active service who had passed the prescribed examination.

The officer ranks in the RYN were almost identical with those in the former Austro-Hungarian Navy. The time required for a line officer to remain in his respective rank before being promoted into the next higher rank varied from 3 to 5 years. Normally an officer was to reach the rank of commander when he had been in active service for 14 years and the rank of rear-admiral after an additional 12 years. The "porucnik korvete" (ensigns) usually spent all their first years in that rank on sea duty. In order to be promoted to the rank of lieutenant, an officer had to possess a certificate qualifying him for 'all-weather' watch duty. While in the rank of lieutenant, an officer was to complete one of six specialist courses offered (gunnery, naval aviation, submarine, mine, torpedo and communications). Many officers who already had the communications specialty were sent to complete a higher naval communications course in Paris.

Petty officers in the RYN came from (1) petty officer school, and (2) from the ranks of seamen. The seamen were drafted from the ages of 21 to 25 and served in active service for 24 months. After eight months in service, or upon completion of a specialist course, they were able to advance into the rank of corporal (kaplar). The first petty officer rank was sergeant (mornaricki podnarednik), into which were promoted all graduates of petty officers schools who had achieved a "B" grade average, or seamen in the rank of corporal with at least 12 months of service in that rank who had completed a specialist course.

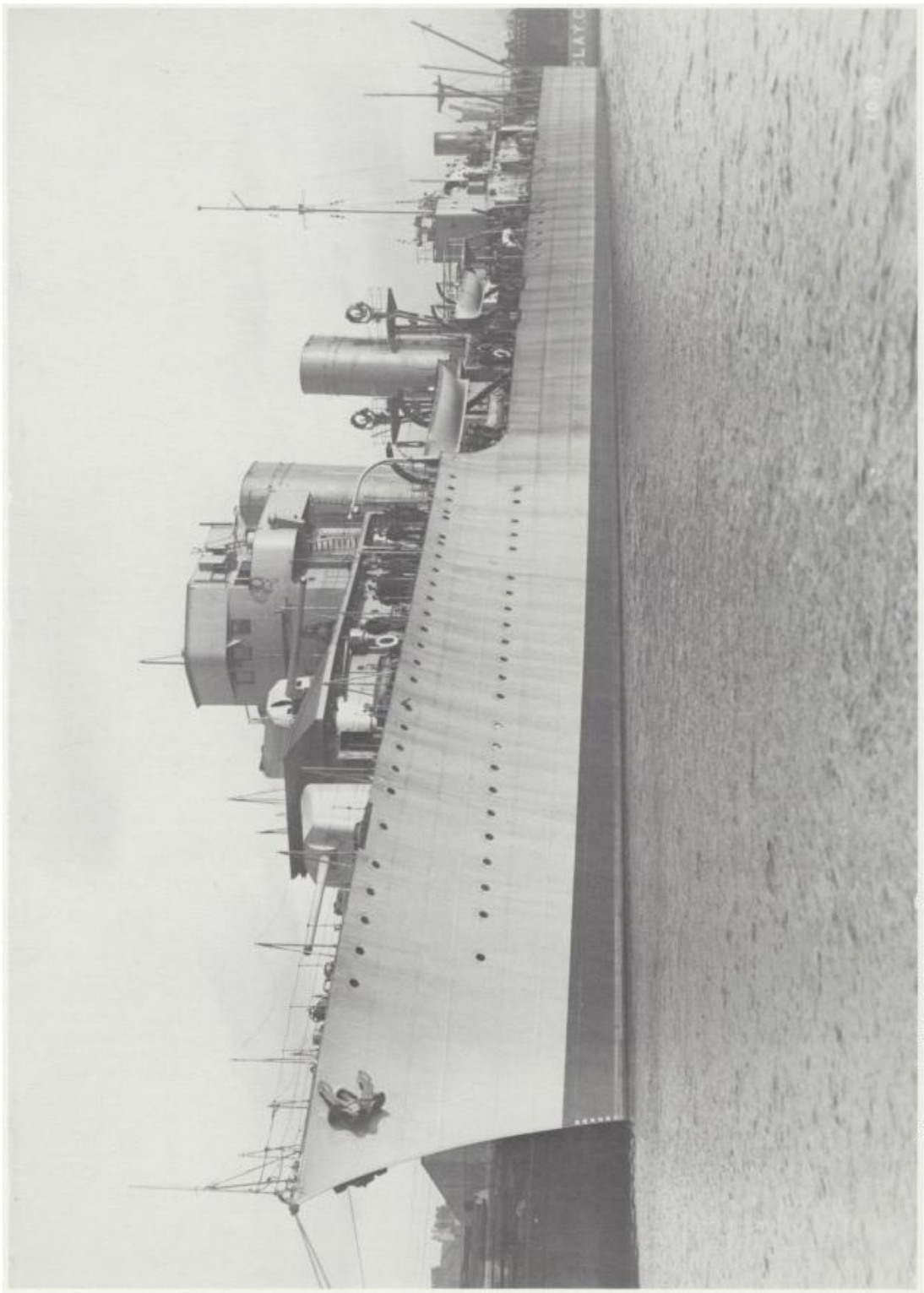
Combat training in the RYN was conducted primarily in the Eskadra, where all active ships were included. The training phases, as in the Austro-Hungarian Navy, were divided into the summer and winter phases. All ships were maintained in active status at all times.

Figure 4: THE ROYAL YUGOSLAV NAVY, 1941: *Ship's Technical Data*

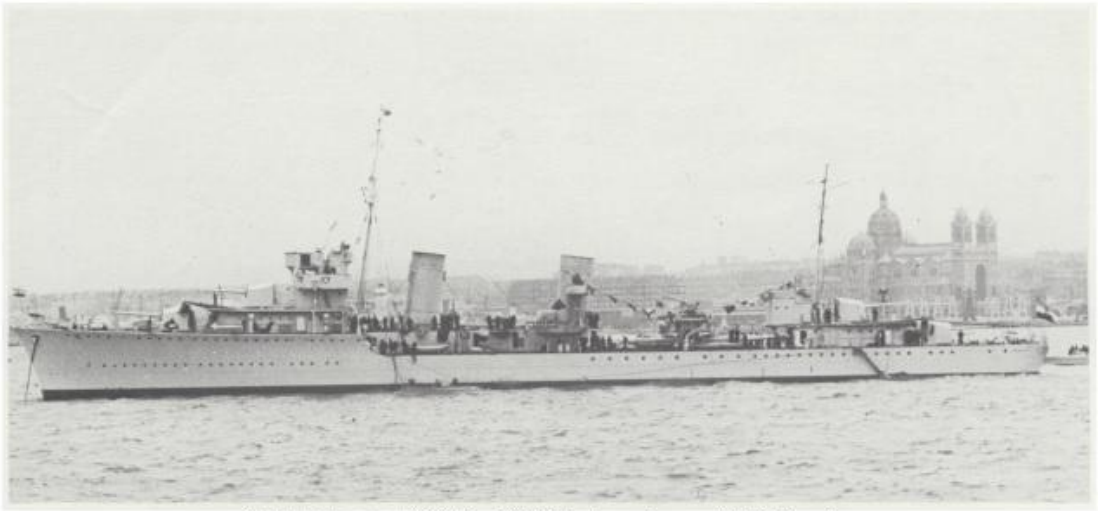
Class	*In service*	*Built*	*Displ.*	*Dimensions (max. in feet)*	*Armament*	*Propulsion (in HP)*	*Speed (Knots)*	*Range (in nm)*
Dalmacija	1	1899	2,360	342 x 38 x 18	6—83/L35 AA 4—47/L44 6—MGs	8,500	21	4,000
Split	+1	—	2,400	393 x 37 x 10	5—140; 10—40 AA 6—21 in. TT; 40 mines	50,000	37	
Dubrovnik	1	1931	1,880	371 x 35 x 12	4—140/L50; 2—83/L35; 6—37 AA; 6—21 in. TT; 6—MGs	48,000	38	7,000/15
Beograd	2	1937–38	1,240	313 x 31 x 10	4—120/L60; 4—50 AA; 6—21 in. TT; 6—MGs; 30 mines	44,000	39	
Type IIB	+2		280/335	148 x 15 x 12	4—21 in. TT	830/—	13/7	
Hrabri	2	1926	975/1,164	236 x 24 x 13	1—100/L40; 6—21 in. TT; 2—MGs	2,400/1,600	16/10	5,000/9
Smeli	2	1928/29	630/809	227 x 24 x 13	1—100/L40; 1—37 AA; 6—21 in. TT; 1—MG 1—66/L30 AA	1,500/1,100	15/9.5	5,000/9 100/4
T-Group	2	1913–15	262	188 x 19 x 5	1—66/L30; 2—MGs 2—21 in. TT; 12 mines	5,000	28	1,100
F-Group	3	1913–15	250					
Orjen	8	1936–37	60	92 x 14 x 5	1—50 AA; 1—MG 2—21 in. TT	3,000	34	1,680
Uskok	2	1927	15	55 x 11 x ?	2—21 in. TT; 4—DCs 2—MGs	800	40	800
Malinska	5	1931	127	174 x 26 x 13	1—66/L30 AA; MG	280	9	
Galeb	6	1917–18	330/550	192 x 23 x 7	2—90/L45; 2—MGs	1,850	15	2,000/14
Vardar	1	1915	530	200 x 34 x 4	2—120/L45; 2—120/L10 hwtz; 3—66/L26 AA; 2—47/L44; 8—MGs	1,500	13	750
Drava	1	1913	450	190 x 34 x 4	2—120/L45; 3—120/L10 hwtz; 2—66/L50; 7—MGs	1,500	13	700
Sava	1	1904	380	184 x 31 x 4	2—120/L35; 1—120/L10 hwtz; 1—66/L50; 1—66/L18; 5—MGs	1,500	13	500
Morava	1	1892	400	177 x 30 x 4	2—120/L42; 2—66/L42; 4—MGs	1,400	10	400
Strazar	2	1929	36	—	2—MGs		9	
Zmaj	1	1928	1,870	249 x 43 x 12	4—83/L35 AA; 4—MGs; 10 sea-planes; 200 mines	3,260	16	
Hvar	1	1896	2,650	318 x 39 x 13	6—MGs	1,100	13	
Sitnica	1	1891	370	158 x 23 x 6.5	2—47; 2—MGs	500	9	
Jadran	1	1932	720	190 x 29 x 14	2—MGs	375	8	
D.2	1	1896	80	128 x 15 x 4	2—37 AA; 1—MG	700	17	800
Spasilac	1	1929	740	174 x 26 x 13	4—MGs	480	10	
Perun	1	1939	4,500	311 x 45 x 20	4—40 AA; 2—MGs		17	
Lovcen	1	1932	561	111 x 26 x 14		300	11	

The new flotilla leader **Dubrovnik** *at Yarrow's Glasgow shipyard during the Winter of 1931–32.* **Photograph by A. T. Kelly, Glasgow, negative No. 1037. Courtesy C. W. Beilstein Collection.**

Three small snapshots of **Dubrovnik,** *reportedly taken in 1934.* **Photographs courtesy C. W. Beilstein Collection.**



***The new flotilla leader* Dubrovnik *fitting out at Yarrow's Glasgow shipyard during the Winter of 1931–32 (the ship was launched 11 Oct. 1931).* Photograph by A. T. Kelly, Glasgow, negative No. 1039; Yarrow photo No. 1565. Courtesy A. D. Baker III Collection.**



Dubrovnik ***seen on 9 October 1934.*** **Photograph copyright Marius Bar.**

The exception was the river flotilla, when due to icing in the winter months, the ships were transferred into inactive status. However, because of the perennial problem in ship maintenance due to the shortage of spare parts, only 50 to 60 percent of the fleet was combat ready at any time.

The RYN conducted quite a few long cruises with large surface combatants visiting Mediterranean ports such as Malta and Bizerte. Submarines often sailed to ports in Greece, Malta and southern France. The training ship *Jadran* made many cruises with midshipmen in the Mediterranean and beyond. For example, she made a visit to Western Europe and the Baltic in 1939. Many foreign naval vessels visited Yugoslavia's ports quite often. For example the British Mediterranean fleet annually visited Yugoslav ports with many of its ships, including battleships and even aircraft carriers.

Summary and Conclusions

In 1941 the Yugoslav Navy still represented a negligible force despite the great progress it had made after 1918. The greatest obstacles to the expansion and modernization of the fleet were (1) the perennial lack of funds, due to the weak state of the country's finances and the predominant position of the army; (2) the great ignorance and lack of interest on the part of the highest Yugoslav officials and military in the navy and maritime matters in general; (3) the lack of strong support for the navy among the public. The Yugoslav Navy was regarded, as had been the case in Austro-Hungary before 1904, as a stepchild of the army rather than a force which could effectively contribute to the defense of the country's borders.

The navy's organization in many respects was a vestige of the former Austro-Hungarian Navy. This was notably the case in the peacetime and wartime organization of naval forces and training. The navy recognized the value of possessing its own air arm, and in that respect was undoubtedly in the forefront of development in comparison with other navies of the day. However, there was a failure to subordinate the coastal surveillance system to respective naval territorial commands. Such a setup was a complete failure, as was shown later in the war in April 1941. Also, giving the responsibility of defending the coast to the Seamen Corps Command and Underwater Weapons Command, instead of creating a separate naval territorial command such as had existed in the former Austro-Hungarian Navy, was an unsatisfactory solution.

The Yugoslav Navy's progress after 1918 would have been faster if it had conducted a clearer and more consistent policy in respect to the expansion and composition of the fleet. The fleet expansion was uneven. There was a great diversity of types and classes of ships acquired. There were too few submarines and torpedo boats and, most surprisingly, no minesweepers. Nor did the navy have ships for patrol duties and the escort of merchant shipping in case of war. Too many ships were acquired from too many foreign sources. Apart from the Austro-Hungarian ships transferred in 1920–21, with very low combat value, the three main sources for acquisition of ships and submarines were England, France and, later, Germany. More and more ships were built in Yugoslavia after 1930, but using foreign designs. The most serious problem was the great variety of armament and equipment onboard individual ships. For example, the flotilla leader *Dubrovnik* had main guns from Czechoslovakia, Swedish AA guns, British torpedo armament, a gunnery fire control system from the Netherlands, and Belgian communications equipment.[14] Such a state of affairs existed on almost all other naval vessels. This undoubtedly made it next to impossible to maintain the fleet at a high state of combat readiness because of the continuing problem in the supply of spare parts.

Naval personnel and the quality of training in the Yugoslav Navy were in many respects similar to those

of the former Austro-Hungarian Navy. For political reasons, postwar Yugoslav authors tend to cast almost all the blame for the navy's deficiencies upon the supposedly detrimental influence of the former Austro-Hungarian officers. However, such claims cannot be sustained in the face of the facts. The Austro-Hungarian Navy was well known for the quality of its officers and men in professional proficiency, training, and high morale and discipline. These qualities were the result of a well-knit and fully capable officer corps. Most of the former officers who entered into the Yugoslav Navy were technically and professionally excellent, and they made a great contribution, especially those of German extraction, to the navy's progress in its formative years and in its later years as well. They introduced regulations and imposed high standards of training into the new navy. Thus it was no surprise that the navy, even in the view of the present Yugoslav authors, consistently had a much higher quality of basic, specialist and technical training than the corresponding schools in the army. Particularly high standards prevailed in the training of petty officers of the machinist and electro specialties. The standards of seamanship and the appearance and cleanliness of ships in the RYN were regarded as being of a high order.

However, the navy did suffer from several rather grave personnel problems. First, the majority of officers and seamen remained Croats and Slovenes on the eve of the war. The country's state administration and military were dominated by the Serbs. Widespread repressive measures undertaken after 1929 against Croats helped greatly to undermine their loyalty to the new state. Also, the Ustasha agitation and Communist subversion was rather effective among the rank and file of naval personnel, especially in the last few years before the war. All this helped to weaken the cohesion of both the navy as a whole and the officer corps in particular. So, although the officers were professionally and technically good-to-excellent, morale and loyalty were suspect. After 1937, some officers were increasingly attracted to Germany and Italy because of the change in Yugoslavia's foreign policy orientation, while others became either defeatist or politically passive. All these occurrences were bound to have negative consequences. This was shown in a most dramatic fashion on April 6, 1941 when Germany and Italy and their allies attacked Yugoslavia. But this story—how the Royal Yugoslav Navy fared in April 1941 and afterwards—remains to be told at another time.

NOTES

[1] Jovan Vasiljevich: "Stvaranje ratne mornarice Kraljevine Jugoslavije (oktobar 1918–septembar 1923)" (The Establishment of the Navy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) *Istorija* XX veka, vol XI (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1970) p. 180 (henceforth cited as Vasiljevich: "Stvaranje ratne mornarice . . .").

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 185.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 171.

[4] Oskar Parkes & Francis McMurtrie, edts: *Jane's Fighting Ships 1923* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, 1923) pp. 316–17.

[5] Vasiljevich: "Stvaranje ratne mornarice . . ." p. 206.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

[7] *Jane's Fighting Ships 1929*, pp. 358–59.

[8] Vasiljevich: "Jugoslovenska flota u Boki Kotorskoj u ratu aprila 1941" (The Yugoslav Fleet in the Gulf of Cattaro in the April War of 1941) *Vojno-istoriski Glasnik* (Military-Historical Herald) (Belgrade) 1 (January–April), 1969, p. 106.

[9] *Jane's Fighting Ships 1936*, pp. 557–58. Also Report of U.S. Military Attache in Belgrade, Lt. Col. E. L. Whitley, November 4, 1936, No. 4142, Record Group-165: G-2 Regional File; Yugoslavia, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C. Box 3658, No. 7570 (Henceforth cited as RG-165).

[10] *Ibid.*, Nov. 4, 1936, ibid.

[11] *Ibid.*,

[12] *Ibid.*, October 31, 1936, ibid., Box 3658 No. 7200.

[13] Vasiljevich: "Bivsa Jugoslavenska ratna mornarica uoci aprilskog rat 1941. godine." (Former Yugoslav Navy on the Eve of the April War 1941) *Mornaricki Glasnik* (Naval Herald) (Belgrade) 6 (November–December) 1968, p. 715.

[14] Mladen Ikica: "Ratna Mornaica Jugoslavije 1918–1941" (The Yugoslav Navy 1918–1941) *Pomorski Zbornik* (Maritime Proceedings) (Zadar) vol I (1962) p. 652.

About the Author:

Dr. Vego is a graduate of the Yugoslav Naval Academy, class of 1961. While on active duty from 1961 through 1973, he served as Commanding Officer of torpedo boats and gun boats of the *Higgins* class. He was naval advisor to the Royal Cambodian Navy in 1964. He resigned in 1973 with the rank of Lieutenant Commander and as CO of the pair of *Shershen* class torpedo boats. From 1973 through 1976, he was 2nd Mate on board West German merchant ships.

Dr. Vego obtained a B.A. and M.A. in Modern History from the Belgrade University and his Ph.D. in European History from the George Washington University. His Dissertation was "Anatomy of Austrian Sea Power 1904–1914." He has a Master Mariner's license, and is presently working as a free-lance naval and military analyst.